

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, ranking members Hwang, Somers and Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Dr. Immacula Cann and I am from Stratford. I am with CT Against Gun Violence. My doctorate is in nursing and my specialty is psychiatric-mental health.

I lost my sister-in-law to gun violence and that has led me to work to improve our laws. However, solutions need to go beyond strong gun laws. As a resident and taxpayer, I am encouraged to see bills such as HB-5397, SB-477 and SB-16 have been put forward in this committee and others that include provisions to address the crisis of community gun violence in Connecticut. All of these bills have great elements worthy of your consideration.

I am testifying in support of the language in HB-5397, An Act Declaring Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis and Establishing the Office of Gun Violence Prevention. The language in this bill has several key elements that should be present in whichever bill is voted out of your committee. The five important components that I would like to convey are:

1. This bill declares that gun violence a public health crisis.
2. It houses the solution in the Department of Public Health where it can have the greatest impact.
3. It has mechanisms to include voices of those most impacted by community gun violence.
4. It includes a robust data gathering and research capacity to drive evidence-informed grant-making.
5. It calls for funding commensurate with the magnitude of the crisis.

Last year gun homicides were the highest in 25 years, nearly double the level in 2018. Gun violence is an epidemic and the spread of guns has made our streets more dangerous—especially our largest communities of color such as Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven. My sister-in-law was murdered when she drove through a large city that was predominately a city of color. She was simply going home! Countless of other families are experiencing the pain of losing loved ones due to gun violence. Beyond the loss of life, gun violence has a tremendous economic cost. As a taxpayer, I am very concerned of the estimated direct cost of \$90 million per year to Connecticut taxpayers regarding all forms of gun violence.

Please recognize the severity of the situation and declare that gun violence a public health crisis as an urgent matter. The urgency of the crisis needs to be addressed by creating an Office of Gun Violence Prevention. Numerous states such as NY, PA, IL, CO, WA have established offices for gun violence prevention with organizational capacity to oversee grantmaking and program implementation similar to that called for by the above bills. In addition, across the country, evidence-informed, community-centric prevention, intervention and aftercare programs have proven records of success. Connecticut legislation should be guided by a sense of duty and responsibility and invest in community-based prevention and intervention solutions. Like most of you living here, we should be vested in our community and the future of Connecticut. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Immacula Cann
Stratford, CT